

CHAPTER 1

Program Descriptions

Data about the Family Law Information Center pilot projects' operations were derived from several sources. Information about staffing, location, hours of service and collaborative work with community based organizations was derived from site visits, focus groups and written descriptions authored by the program directors. Information about numbers of customers, methods of service delivery, case types, issues raised within those cases, and the specific types of services requested is taken from operations data maintained by the pilots for the fiscal year 2001-2002. Fiscal year 2001-2002 was selected as the evaluation year because the pilot programs maintained operations data in a manner that was comprehensive and comparative during this period.

I. STAFFING

The Family Law Information Center Act (Fam. Code, §15000) requires that at least one of the three pilot programs be created within the local office of the family law facilitator. In fact, all the Family Law Information Centers are operated by the local family law facilitator offices.

**FAMILY LAW INFORMATION CENTER
LOCATIONS & STAFFING**

| COURT | STAFF | LOCATIONS | GRANT FUNDING ⁶ |
|-------------|---|---|----------------------------|
| LOS ANGELES | 1 attorney 2 paralegals* ⁷ 2 clerical* | Central Norwalk | \$145,000/yr. |
| FRESNO | 2 attorneys 6 paralegals* 1 clerical* 1 court clerk* | Fresno, Firebaugh Reedley, Kerman Sanger, Coalinga | \$77,500/yr. |
| SUTTER | .4 attorney 3 court clerks* | Yuba City | \$77,500/yr. |

⁶ Each court contributed funding in differing amounts that allowed additional staff to be allocated to the Family Law Information Center pilot program.

⁷ The * indicates part-time workers. The degree to which these individuals could devote time to the Family Law Information Center was dependent on the amount of additional funding contributed by their particular courts.

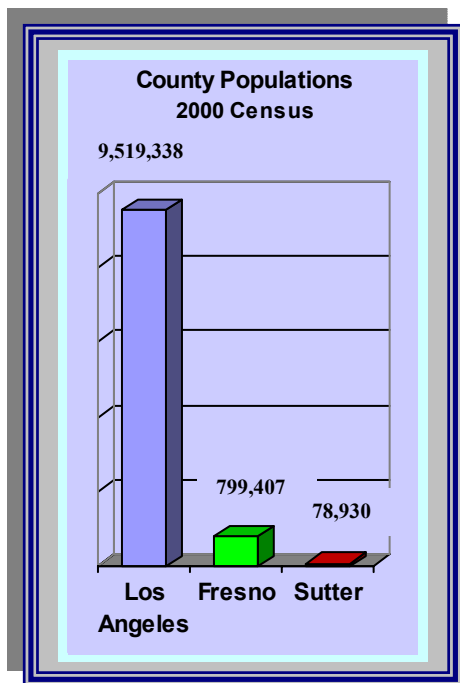
Family Law Information Centers FY 2001–2002

* Budget: \$300,000

* The Los Angeles, Fresno and Sutter courts provided additional funding to the Family Law Information Centers in the total amount of \$120,000.

* Combined funding provided services to over 45,000 individuals.

* Cost is slightly over \$9.33 per customer



In all locations, the support staff working in the Family Law Information Centers were parttime. Support staff time was shared with either the family law facilitator, or the court clerk's offices. In Sutter, the attorney for the Family Law Information Center attorney shared her time with the family law facilitator's office. All three pilot courts contributed different levels of additional funding to these programs. The aggregate contribution by the courts was \$120,000.00 for fiscal year 2001-2002.

II. DAYS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

Los Angeles County

In central Los Angeles, the Family Law Information Center is open Monday through Wednesday from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. with an hour for lunch, and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. until noon. The office is closed on Fridays. Before October 2002 the center was open Monday through Friday, but the hours of service have been reduced owing to cuts in the court's budget.

The Norwalk Family Law Information Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. with an hour for lunch. Cuts in the court's budget have reduced the paralegal time available in this location.

Fresno County

Two Family Law Information Center attorneys provide direct services to the public in six locations throughout the county. The main Family Law Information Center in downtown Fresno is open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. with an hour for lunch. On Friday, the office opens at 9:00 a.m. and continues as usual the rest of the day. On Wednesday evenings, divorce workshops are being initiated.

The two Family Law Information Center staff attorneys go to outlying areas to provide services throughout the week. On Mondays, services are available at the court in Firebaugh, on Tuesdays in Reedley and Kerman, on Wednesdays in Sanger, and on Thursdays in Coalinga. Services are also available on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday at the Selma Regional Center. On Friday afternoons, divorce workshops are held at the Selma Regional Center. Further, the Fresno Superior Court has a mobile van that delivers legal assistance to other rural

towns 8 to 12 times per month, and to the Rescue Mission and other homeless shelters and similar facilities.

Sutter County

The Sutter County Family Law Information Center is located in a family law center that also houses the child support commissioner's courtroom, and family court services. The office is open every weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.. Subject matter workshops are held every morning at 9:00 a.m. according to a monthly schedule published by the Family Law Information Center. On Monday mornings, the family law Information Center attorney is also available in the Family Law courtroom for the motion calendar and assists unrepresented litigants with procedural information. The Sutter County Family Law Information Center serves individuals from Yuba, Colusa, and Butte counties.

III. THE FAMILY LAW INFORMATION CENTER PROCESS

The manner in which services are delivered varies within all the Family Law Information Centers. There are four basic categories of contacts: (1) one-on-one direct contact; (2) workshops; (3) telephone help-line assistance; and, (4) correspondence.

All the Family Law Information Centers provide forms, instructional packets, various types of educational materials, and computer access. The directors of the Family Law Information Centers are convinced that while some individuals are able to use these self-help resources adequately, none of these methods is useful in isolation.⁸ Each method needs to be part of a comprehensive system that is centered on legally trained staff available to answer questions.

Los Angeles County

The design of the Los Angeles County program has been determined to a great extent by the large volume of customers it must serve. The staffing resources for the Family Law Information Center in Los Angeles do not reach levels sufficient to meet the demand for in-depth, individualized

⁸ J.W. Meeker and R. Utman, *An Evaluation of the Legal Aid Society of Orange County's Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!)* Project (University of California, Irvine, 2002) p. iii. Kiosk or Web-based self-help forms systems are strongest when part of a more integrated system of pro per assistance.

IN-PERSON SERVICES ARE PROVIDED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:

- ONE-ON-ONE
- WORKSHOPS
- TELEPHONE HELP-LINE
- CORRESPONDENCE.

**LOS ANGELES
COUNTY
FY 2001–2002**

38,521 CUSTOMERS

TELEPHONE
ASSISTANCE AND
TRIAGING ARE CRUCIAL
FOR LOS ANGELES
WHERE THE VOLUME OF
PEOPLE REQUESTING
ASSISTANCE IS
SUBSTANTIALLY
LARGER THAN IN THE
OTHER TWO PILOT
COUNTIES.

*“The Family Law
Information Center staff
person was the best. She
helped about 20 people with
different kinds of
problems—she made
everyone feel good before
leaving.”*

Customer, 2000

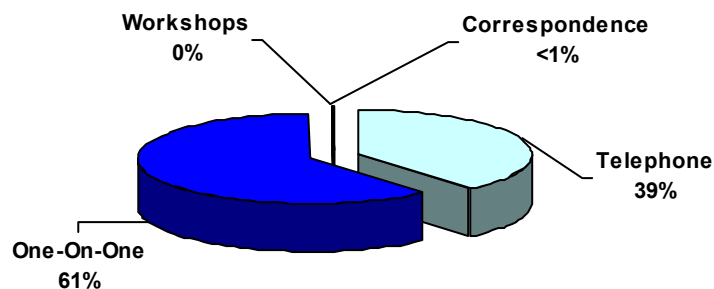
service. As a result, the program focuses on providing information about remedies and procedures, and making correct forms with written instructions available to the customers. Individualized assistance with forms preparation is not provided, and document review services can only be offered in about a third of the cases. Customers are served on a drop-in, first-come-first-serve basis.

The Los Angeles County Family Law Information Center also uses a telephone help-line⁹ strategy to increase access to its services. While most of the customers are served in person, the telephone permits additional assistance to those who can not get to the courthouse because of work, childcare, or transportation problems. The Los Angeles County program is the only one of the three pilots that has employed this telephone help-line strategy to increase access for the public.

The Los Angeles County program has recently begun to collaborate with Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles to provide workshops for dissolution cases. The Family Law Information Center schedules litigants into the workshops. The workshops are conducted by legal aid attorneys and are structured in a three-part design. The first workshop helps get the case started. Workshop number two helps the litigants move the case through default or trial setting. The third workshop helps complete the final judgment.

CONTACT TYPES

Los Angeles



**Total Customers - 38,521
FY 01/02**

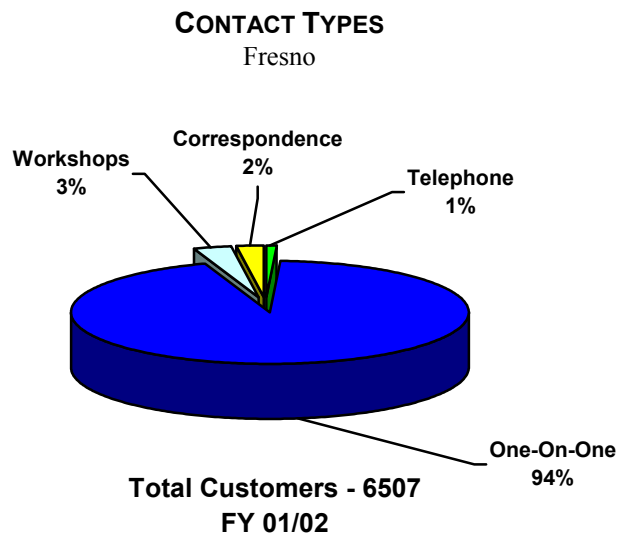
⁹ J. Pearson and L. Davis, *The Hotline Outcomes Assessment Study: Final Report Phase III: Full Scale Telephone Survey*.

http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1037814145.6/Hotline_Phase3.pdf
Telephone hotline services are most effective when used for brief services (such as those offered at the Family Law Information Centers.)

Fresno County

The Fresno County Family Law Information Center has addressed the issue of access by arranging to send attorneys and paralegals out into the community to provide one-on-one service. The services occur at outlying courts, at community centers, or in the mobile self-help van. Fresno provides individualized information and assistance in both preparation and filing of forms. The level of services exceeds the Los Angeles program due to a combination of smaller demand and greater staff resources. Even so, as the numbers of those requesting assistance continue to grow in fiscal year 2002–2003, the center has been working toward use of workshops as a viable service delivery method.

Fresno is unique in that the majority of customers are served on an appointment basis. Triage and program administration occur at the main office in Fresno. Only emergency cases and cases involving imminent court deadlines are seen on a walk-in basis at the main Fresno office. All other matters, including services in the outlying areas, are handled by appointment. When there are no-shows for appointments, drop-in customers may be accommodated.



FRESNO COUNTY FY 2001–2002

**6,464
CUSTOMERS**

*SERVICES ARE PROVIDED
AT 6 OUTLYING COURTS
AND REGIONAL CENTERS. A
MOBILE VAN SERVES
ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS IN
THE COMMUNITY.*

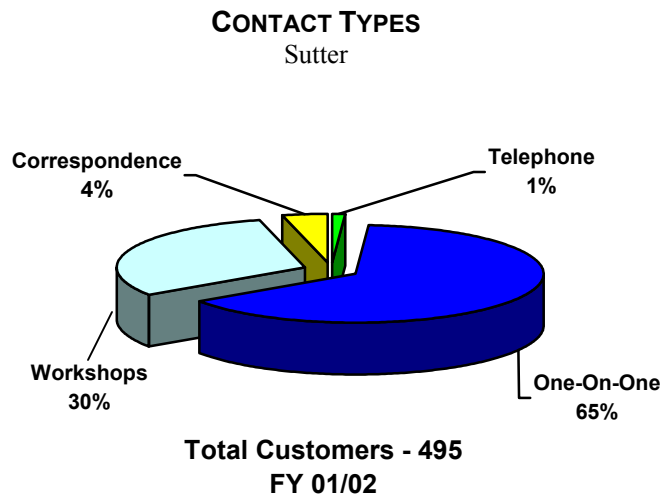
**Sutter County
FY 2001–2002**

**511
CUSTOMERS**

*25% OF THE CENTER'S
CUSTOMERS ARE FROM
YUBA, COLUSA, AND
BUTTE COUNTIES.*

Sutter County

The Sutter County Family Law Information Center provides substantial workshop assistance. Individual assistance is provided to litigants in complex and high-risk cases or where there are other special needs. Workshop topics include: starting a dissolution, answering a petition, modifying child custody, child support issues, and finalizing judgments. No appointment is necessary to attend a workshop. The schedule is published monthly.¹⁰ The child support commissioner, whose courtroom is located in the same facility as the Family Law Information Center, is provided with a monthly workshop schedule and can set litigants up for a workshop directly.



IV. CASE TYPES AND ISSUES

There are four major types of cases in family law. Within each case, there are rules about which issues, such as custody or support of children, may or may not be raised.

Definitions

Dissolution Cases. Traditionally, family law covers several different types of cases. Each case type is defined by the relationship between the parties. For example, cases types involving the marital relationship are dissolution (divorce), legal separation and nullity. In these marital cases, examples of potential issues within them are: custody/visitation, child

¹⁰ The Sutter County Family Law Information Center workshop schedule for November 2002 is attached a Appendix E.

support, spousal support, division of property and debt, and domestic violence restraining orders.

Paternity Cases. If parties are unmarried, but have minor children in common, they may file an action to legally determine parentage. This is called a paternity case and it is filed under the Uniform Parentage Act (UPA). Examples of issues that can be raised in a paternity case are: parentage, child support, custody/visitation and domestic violence restraining orders. Because the parties are not married, they may not raise issues of spousal support or property division within this case type.

Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement Cases. These cases are filed by the State of California through the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS). The purpose of such cases is to establish and collect child support. Parents may be married or unmarried. If they are unmarried the Title IV-D case will seek to establish who the legal parents are. Once parentage has been established, then issues of child custody/visitation, child support and restraining orders may be raised within this type of case.

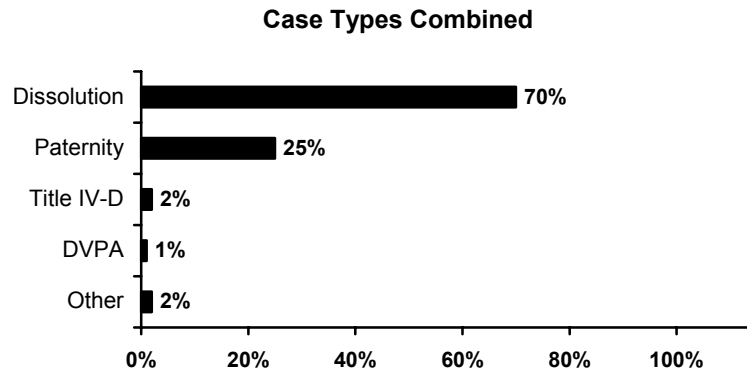
Domestic Violence Prevention Act Cases. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) allows a victim of domestic violence to seek protective restraining orders without the necessity of filing a dissolution or paternity case within which to raise this issue. The issues of custody/visitation and child support may be raised within a DVPA case as long as parentage has been established elsewhere. The issue of parentage itself will not be heard with in this type of case.

Other Case Types. There are also other types of cases that sometimes appear in the cluster of family law matters. Each has its own set of rules about what issues can be raised. Examples of such cases are: juvenile dependency, probate guardianships, adoptions, name changes, civil harassment restraining orders, petitions for custody/support, and registration of foreign judgments.

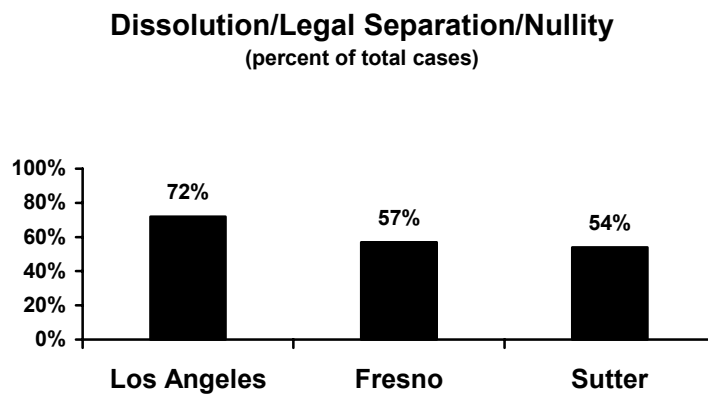
The majority of assistance provided by the Family Law Information Centers was within the four main case types: dissolution, paternity, Title IV-D child support enforcement cases, and Domestic Violence Prevention Act cases.

DISSOLUTION IS THE
MOST COMMON CASE
TYPE.

"I had some difficult questions pertaining to my divorce and they were answered very well by your staff. I think they are extremely helpful for people going through this difficult and complex legal system."
Customer, 2001



Dissolution Cases



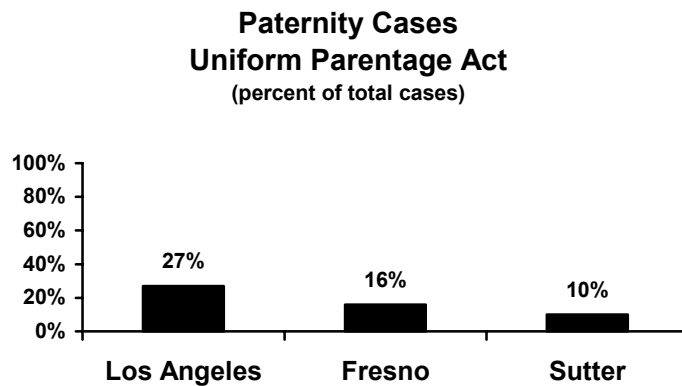
The Los Angeles County Family Law Information Center handles a larger percentage of dissolution cases than the Sutter or Fresno County programs. The family law facilitator in Los Angeles County does not handle any dissolution cases, even when child support is an issue.¹¹ The Family Law Information Center provides the only court-operated source for assistance with dissolution available in either of the program locations in Los Angeles.

In Fresno and Sutter Counties, the family law facilitators' offices do provide assistance with child support arising in

¹¹ Family law facilitators are only funded to provide services with respect to child support and child support related issues. The focus of the family law facilitators is on child support raised in Title IV-D cases, but facilitators may also provide child support services in other types of cases. If the family law facilitator provides services on any issues other than child support, or child support related matters, the court must contribute the additional funding needed to provide that service.

dissolution cases. The Fresno County and Sutter County courts have provided additional funding to the family law facilitator programs as well as to the Family Law Information Center programs.

Paternity Cases



As with dissolution cases, the Los Angeles County Family Law Information Center handles a greater percentage of paternity (UPA) cases than do the Fresno or Sutter County programs. The Los Angeles Family Law Information Center is the only court-operated service available in the program's locations to help with paternity cases since the family law facilitator does not handle them.

In Fresno and Sutter Counties, the family law facilitators' offices do provide assistance with child support arising in paternity cases.

Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement Cases

In Los Angeles County, the family law facilitator provides all services related to Title IV-D child support enforcement cases. If customers come to the Family Law Information Center requesting help on a Title IV-D case, they are referred to the family law facilitator.

PATERNITY CASES
ESTABLISH THE LEGAL
RIGHTS AND
RESPONSIBILITIES OF
UNMARRIED PARENTS.

PATERNITY CASES MAKE
UP THE SECOND LARGEST
CATEGORY OF CASES
HANDLED BY THE FAMILY
LAW INFORMATION
CENTERS.

*"I think it is great you have
services like this to help
parents who need it.*

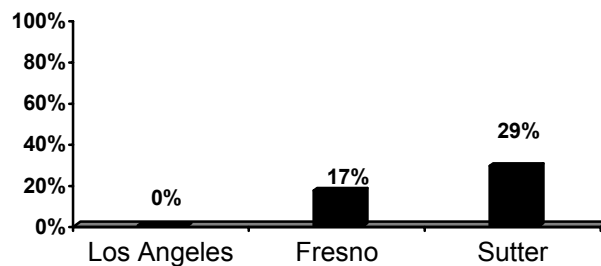
Customer, 2002

FAMILY LAW
INFORMATION CENTERS
WORK IN CLOSE
COLLABORATION WITH
OTHER AGENCIES TO
PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN
CASES INVOLVING
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

*"I needed help to keep my
kids in a safe environment; I
would have been lost without
the Center."*

Customer, 2002

Title IV-D Child Support Enforcement (percent of total cases)



In both Fresno and Sutter Counties, the family law facilitators provide most of the services related to Title IV-D child support enforcement cases; however, the Family Law Information Centers also will help in these cases.

Domestic Violence Prevention Act Cases

Because of their emergency nature, domestic violence cases are among the most time-consuming matters for a self-help center to handle. None of the three Family Law Information Center handled a large percentage of domestic violence cases. The Fresno County program (8 percent) had the highest proportion of such cases. All three pilot programs have formed collaborations with community based legal services and domestic violence shelters to serve these cases.

In the central Los Angeles Family Law Information Center, domestic violence cases are referred to the Domestic Violence Project located in the same building and operated by the Los Angeles County Bar Association. Additionally, the Family Law Information Center has developed an interactive, touch-screen self-help kiosk that is available at the Domestic Violence Project located in the courthouse.

In Norwalk, domestic violence cases are referred to a domestic violence clinic in the same facility, operated by the Legal Aid Society of Orange County.

The Fresno County Family Law Information Center sees domestic violence cases on an emergency walk-in basis at the main office in Fresno. The center also conducts domestic violence workshops on alternate Friday mornings and

collaborates with Central California Legal Services and Centro La Familia to assist with domestic violence matters.

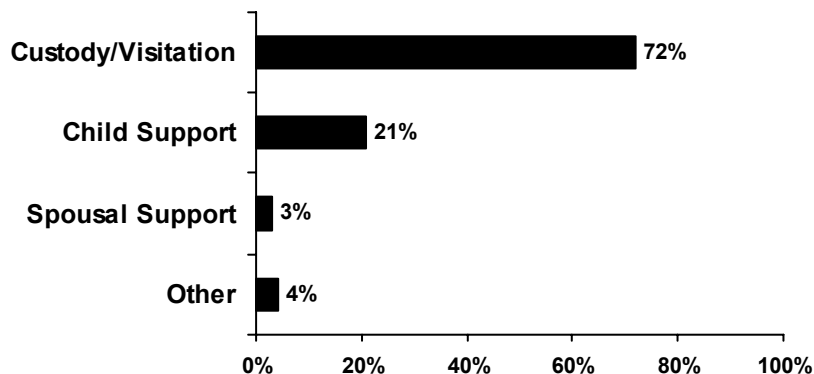
The Sutter County program collaborates with a local women's shelter in the preparation of domestic violence restraining order forms; does document review prior to filing to see that the papers are in order; and works with family court services, located in the same facility, to arrange for mediation if appropriate, and for supervised visitation.

Other Case Types

The other types of cases in which the Family Law Information Centers provided some assistance constitute less than 3 percent in any one of the programs. All three Family Law Information Centers have created directories of legal and social service and make referrals as needed for additional help.

V. MOST FREQUENTLY RAISED ISSUES WITHIN THE CASE TYPES

The most frequently raised issues within any given case type were child custody and visitation, and child support.



Child Custody and Visitation

The Family Law Information Centers each experienced an enormous number of requests for assistance in matters involving child custody and/or visitation.

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Los Angeles | 78% |
| Fresno | 50% |
| Sutter | 46% |

“The Center helps a lot to prevent violent separation in couples.”

Customer, 2002

72% OF ALL REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE INVOLVE ISSUES OF CHILD CUSTODY AND/OR VISITATION.

“The Family Law Information Center staff was very helpful, knowledgeable, in giving options and information about avenues a father can take. . . I left with hope at having a father’s chance being a part of my children’s lives.”

Customer, 2000

21% OF ALL
REQUESTS FOR
ASSISTANCE INVOLVE
ISSUES OF CHILD
SUPPORT.

In Los Angeles County, the Family Law Information Center is once again the only court-operated service available in program locations to provide help. When an individual requests assistance from the Family Law Information Center concerning a child custody matter, the case is first assessed to determine the complexity of the issues and the available remedies and procedures. If the issues are complex, and the person can qualify for a legal service program,¹² a referral is made to the appropriate service. Individuals who do not qualify for legal aid are advised to seek private legal representation. Individuals are informed that if they cannot obtain representation from either legal aid or a private attorney, they should return to the Family Law Information Center to obtain appropriate forms and instructional materials for self-representation.

Instructional packets are provided for married and nonmarried parents. The packets contain samples and specific instructions for the various case types and particular situations. Litigants, who may be either petitioners or respondents, are provided detailed instructions, relative to any case type, on how to obtain an order, to change an order, or to get an emergency protective order for custody. Individuals who already have a case open within which to proceed are so informed and assisted with the proper procedure to obtain an order. Individuals who need to file initial cases are given instructions on how to get that accomplished so that they can proceed to make their request regarding custody. Procedural information is also provided with respect to filing and service of the papers.

Both Fresno and Sutter Counties also assess their cases to determine if any emergency orders are necessary. Services are available to both petitioners and respondents in all case types. The Fresno County and Sutter County programs provide assistance in preparation and filing of paperwork.

Child Support

For all the Family Law Information Center pilots combined, 21 percent of the requests for assistance involved issues of child support.

¹² Individuals must have income at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level to qualify for assistance from legal aid.

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Los Angeles | 18% |
| Sutter | 33% |
| Fresno | 32% |

The Los Angeles Family Law Information Center sees all child support issues in dissolution, paternity and domestic violence cases. In Sutter and Fresno Counties, the Family Law Information Center shares the responsibility of providing assistance in matters of child support with the family law facilitator.

Spousal Support and Other Issues

Spousal support was the least frequently appearing legal matter in all the Family Law Information Centers. In none of the programs were spousal support issues seen more than 5 percent of the time.

There was some variance in the amount of other nonspecified issues seen at the Family Law Information Centers:

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Los Angeles | 1% |
| Sutter | 16% |
| Fresno | 17% |

Other issues that arose in the Family Law Information Centers included the following: requests for mediation of financial issues, help with preparation of mandatory settlement conference statements, grandparent visitation, motions to bifurcate issues for trial, motions to quash service, requests for dismissal, restorations of former name.

Referrals for Additional Services

The Los Angeles County program has developed a system of collaborations with large numbers of service providers to whom referrals can be made. There is a list of nonprofit and lawyer referral service organizations available to the public. The directory of community resources includes domestic violence shelters, parent education, counseling and mental health services, and job placement. An advisor from InfoLine¹³ who is present in the facility in central Los Angeles

¹³ InfoLine of Los Angeles provides information and referrals for more than 4,500 services in the county.

FAMILY LAW
FACILITATORS ARE THE
PRIMARY PROVIDERS
OF TITLE IV-D CHILD
SUPPORT SERVICES.

"I felt overwhelmed with the paperwork needed to get child support, and I got all the information I needed to complete it."

Customer, 2002

WORKING WITH OTHER
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS IS
CENTRAL TO FAMILY
LAW INFORMATION
CENTERS.

*“Without the Family Law
Information Center staff, we
never would have figured
anything out.”*

Customer, 2000

several days each week helps connect the customers with appropriate services in the community. The Family Law Information Center also works with the Victim’s Assistance Program of the Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office, the Guardianship Volunteer Project, Legal Aid of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Bar Association’s domestic violence project, and Legal Aid Society of Orange County.

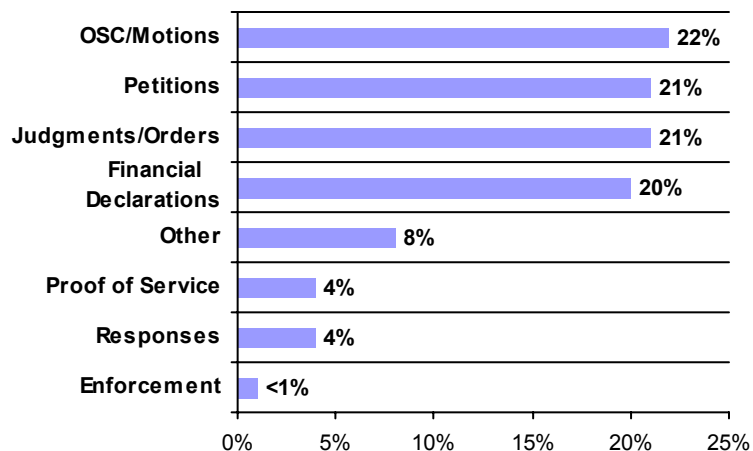
The Fresno Family Law Information Center works with Central California Legal Services (CCLS) to provide a bilingual staff person in the main Fresno office two days per week. CCLS has also accompanied the mobile van to help in the outlying areas, and staffs the Selma Regional Center on Tuesdays each week, when the Family Law Information Center staff are not present. In addition, the program works with Centro La Familia, which has staff in several of the locations to which the mobile van travels.

In Sutter County, the Family Law Information Center provides direct services to most individuals who request them. The program collaborates with the family law facilitators in neighboring Yuba, Colusa, and Butte counties, as well as with California Rural Legal Aid and local domestic violence women’s shelters.

VI. TYPES OF PAPERWORK AND INFORMATION PROVIDED

Litigants without attorneys need assistance at all stages of the legal process.

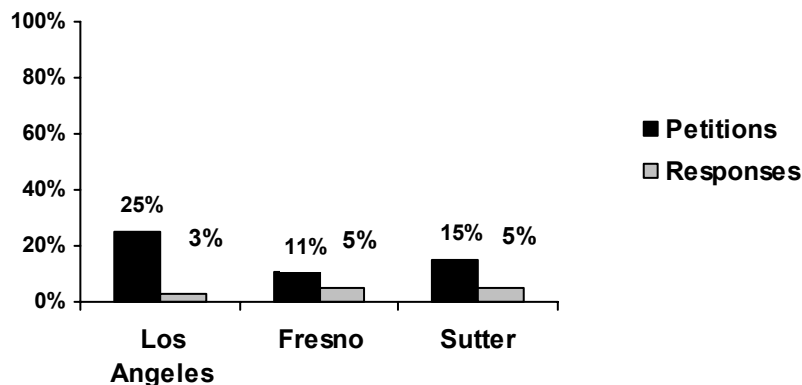
Types of Service Required



Initial Stages of the Proceedings

As previously noted, the majority of litigants request assistance with issues of child custody/visitation and child support. To get a court order on any of these issues, a case must already be on file, or one must be initiated.

Petitions & Responses
Starting A Case
(percent of customers requesting service)



Petitioners in family law actions are far more likely than respondents to seek assistance from the Family Law Information Centers in the initial stages of the proceedings. All of the programs were asked more frequently to help with the filing of petitions than the filing of responses. The Family Law Information Center directors point out that while both the petitioner and the respondent need assistance in the initial stages of an action, the petitioner probably feels the need of assistance more acutely. Initiating the petition is a complicated task requiring thoughtful preparation. Additionally, it is the petitioner whose idea it is to seek intervention by the court system in the first place. While respondents do occasionally seek help to file formal responses, the Family Law Information Centers are far more likely to see respondents in the later stages of the proceedings, frequently through requests for assistance in preparing motions to set aside default orders or to modify orders previously obtained by the petitioner.

Getting or Changing Court Orders

The type of task most frequently required is assistance with respect to the filing of orders to show cause(OSC)/ motions. The preparation and filing of an OSC/motion is necessary in

“The service was helpful because it went beyond the questions I asked and gave the next steps after filing the case.”

Customer, 2002

“Wonderful to have this service available because the process is so confusing.”

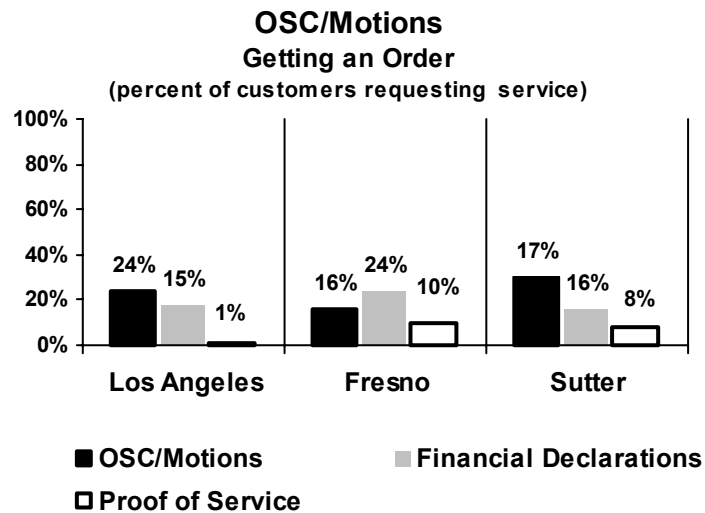
Customer, 2002

“The staff really assisted me and broke everything down into steps for me.”

Customer, 2002

When a litigant appears for his or her hearing without having successfully accomplished effective service or without a completed proof of service, the case will be postponed until a later date or dropped. This will cause distress to the litigant and take valuable court time.

order to obtain a court date for the purpose of establishing or changing orders for child custody, visitation, child support, spousal support, and many other issues. Custodial parents often seek orders for child support. Noncustodial parents may be seeking orders for visitation with the children or modification of child support orders.

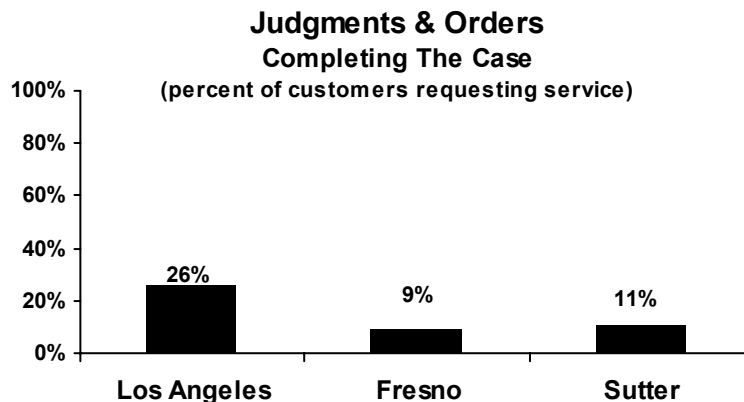


To get an order from the court, not only must the litigant file an OSC/motion, the papers must also be properly served on the opposing party. Historically, this has been a tremendous obstacle to litigants without attorneys, for a variety of reasons. They may not understand that they cannot serve the papers themselves; they cannot find the other party to serve; they do not know they have to have a written proof of service form to present to the court before any order can be made; or they fill out the proof of service incorrectly. Often they are not aware of what alternative service methods may be available or how to access those options. For example, a complicated series of actions is required to accomplish service by publication or by posting. When a litigant appears for his or her hearing without having successfully accomplished effective service or without a completed proof of service, the case will be postponed until a later date or dropped. This will cause distress to the litigant and take valuable court time.

If there are financial issues of any kind involved, such as child or spousal support, the litigants are required to prepare detailed income and expense declarations. Sometimes a simpler form can be used, but often a four-page detailed financial form must be completed. If the financial forms are not completed at the time of the hearing, the case may be postponed to a later date, creating another situation in which

court time is wasted and the litigant is frustrated. Even more financial forms are required if the litigant cannot afford the court's filing fee and must ask to have it waived.

Completing the Case



Each time there is a hearing in a case where the judge makes an order, it needs to be memorialized in writing. It is usually the responsibility of the attorney to prepare the written document, called an order after hearing. Self-represented litigants do not know how to prepare such orders in a manner that will be acceptable to the court and to law enforcement. As a result, frequently litigants without attorneys go without written orders to which they can refer. It is extremely difficult for litigants to be fully aware of their rights and responsibilities arising from the court order without having a written order. Additionally, lack of a written order leaves the court file with only an abbreviated minute order to which the judge can refer when reviewing the file for future hearings.¹⁴ Lack of written orders after hearing creates time loss and frustration for litigants, judges, and law enforcement.

Completing the judgment in a case is often very complicated for a litigant without an attorney. If the respondent has filed a formal response, the litigants must figure out how to get the case onto the court's trial calendar.

Even when there has been no response filed, a default or uncontested judgment may be very difficult to accomplish. In dissolution cases, litigants frequently do not understand that after filing their petition they must take additional steps to

"I had not taken care of my divorce for 3 years because of financial and lack of knowledge in procedures. The Family Law Information Center staff guided me through kindly and intelligently. Extremely helpful. Without it I would have probably just taken the paperwork home and put it aside 3 more years."

Customer, 2002

¹⁴ A minute order is made by the courtroom clerk. It contains an extremely abbreviated version of the judge's order and is not signed by the judge.

“They are great assistance for individuals who do not understand the legal process and forms.”

Customer, 2001

finish the case. A common error is the perception that the court will automatically enter a judgment six months after the petition is filed as long as the opposing party does not respond. There are additional steps, requiring the preparation and service of complicated disclosure forms prior to entry of a final judgment. And there are several more judgment-related forms that must be completed. Even in uncontested default cases, self-represented litigants frequently have their judgment papers returned to them repeatedly by the court owing to a myriad of possible errors or omissions. Some just give up trying. For those who believe their final judgment has been entered automatically by the court, often problems arise in the context of future marriages based on the erroneous belief that a divorce was finalized.

In Uniform Parentage Act paternity cases, the lack of a judgment can have serious impacts on the minor children. Often the self-represented parent in such an action has filed the initial pleadings to start the case, then made a motion for the desired relief such as custody/visitation or child support, gone to court, and gotten a temporary order on the issues raised. The parent does not think to pursue the case further to the final judgment of paternity. Without the final judgment of paternity, the child will not have inheritance rights or rights to benefits such as social security, as a dependent of the respondent parent.

Enforcement

There was very little demand for services to help with enforcement of judgments. That may be due to two main factors: (1) the Department of Child Support Services is primarily responsible for providing enforcement service in matters of child support, and (2) the most frequent procedure for enforcement of custody/visitation orders is the filing of a motion to modify the existing order. This modification motion would be recorded as an OSC/motion rather than an enforcement action.

Other Requested Services

In Fresno County, other types of services make up 22 percent of the requests for help at the Family Law Information Center. In Sutter County, 15 percent of customers request other types of service, and in Los Angeles County this group makes up 20 percent of customers. Examples of other types of services

requested by Family Law Information Center customers include the following:

- Child abduction;
- Joinder motions;
- Minor's contracts;
- Review of court files;
- Explanation of orders and other documents;
- Providing copies of minute orders;
- Correction of various prior procedural mistakes;
- Financial mediation services; and
- Referrals to community-based services.

All the Family Law Information Center pilots have provided services as set out in Family Code section 15000 et seq. They have also provided an array of additional services as dictated by the needs of the public and the court itself. ■

“This is a good system to help individuals dealing with different situations.”
Customer, 2002